



Christine Quintasket (Mourning Dove)

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There are two things I am most grateful for in my life. The first is that I was born a descendant of the genuine Americans, the Indians; the second, that my birth happened in the year 1888. In that year the Indians of my tribe, the Colville (Swy-ayl-puh), were well into the cycle of history involving their readjustment in living conditions. They were in a pathetic state of turmoil caused by trying to learn how to till the soil for a living, which was being done on a very small and crude scale. It was no easy matter for members of this aboriginal stock, accustomed to making a different livelihood (by the bow and arrow), to handle the plow and sow seed for food. Yet I was born long enough ago to have known people who lived in the ancient way before everything started to change.

— Mourning Dove, *A Salishan Autobiography*

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Quick Facts

- * 1888-1936
- * One of the first female Native American novelists
- * Wrote *Cogewea, the Half-Blood* (1927)

This page was researched and submitted by Carol Miller on 10/11/96

Biography

Mourning Dove was the literary name chosen by Christine (or Christal) Quintasket, an Okanogan from the Colville Reservation of eastern Washington. She is credited with one of the earliest novels, *Cogewea, the Half-Blood*, (1927) to be written by an American Indian woman. At the urging of her editor and supporter, Lucullus V. McWhorter, she also collected a group of traditional Okanogan stories, eventually published as *Coyote Stories* (1933). Her personal reminiscences were published in 1990 under the title, *Mourning Dove, A Salishan Autobiography*, fifty-four years after her death in 1936.

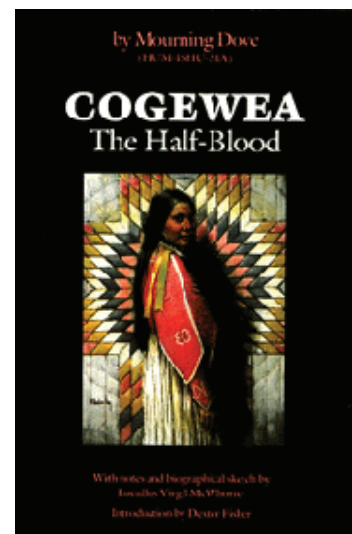


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Biography continued

Mourning Dove's Indian name was Humishuma. She was born in Idaho, probably in 1888, of an Okanogan father, Joseph Quintasket, and a Colville mother, Lucy Stukin. Some discrepancies may be noted in the rather sparse information available about Mourning Dove's life. By her own account, however, she had a happy childhood within the extended family headed by her authoritative mother. Within that home, she was influenced not only by her mother, who died when Mourning Dove was fourteen, but by the older woman whom the family took in and who, assuming the traditional role of grandmother, supervised the girl's spiritual training. From a white orphan also adopted into the family, Mourning Dove learned to speak English and to read the "yellowback" novels which probably contributed some of Cogewea's melodramatic elements.

Mourning Dove's limited formal education began at the Goodwin Mission School near Kettle Falls, Washington, where she was enrolled sporadically between 1895 and 1899. She spent a few years more at the Fort Spokane School for Indians, worked in exchange for classes at the Fort Shaw Indian School in Montana, and briefly attended a secretarial school in Alberta so that she could learn to type as a way of pursuing her ambition to become a writer. It was not, however, as a writer but as a migrant worker that Mourning Dove earned her principal livelihood as an adult. Earning a meager living as a fruit and vegetable picker by day, trying to write in her camp tent at night, she experienced years of poverty and physical hardship.





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Selected Bibliography

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